

## Turning the Light on the Movies

**C**ONTROL of the motion picture industry is in the hands of a very few persons. Thousands of theaters all over the United States are at the mercy of a trust. The trust dictates one-sided contracts, and the theater owner must exhibit pictures the trust furnishes whether they please his patrons or not. The theater owner has no choice. That is why many theaters in the smaller towns are unable to put on features that are shown in the large cities. The motion picture monopoly is endeavoring to strengthen its

domination of the industry by building and buying into theaters. In at least two instances the trust resorted to persecution to accomplish its ends in this respect. To show conditions as they are, THE DEARBORN INDEPENDENT will publish several articles dealing with the industry, in which will be depicted the methods of the trust and the struggles of the "independents." The story on this page is introductory, in a way, to these articles, "The Truth About the Films," by John B. Wallace. The first of the series will begin next week.

## Mis-Picturing Us Abroad

By AARON HARDY ULM

**"W**E WANT immensely to see your country. We had planned to visit the States. But we have decided not to go because—well, we are afraid our lives would not be safe!"

The speaker was the wife of a European business man and the words were uttered to a young American at Batavia, the capital of Java, Dutch Indies.

"Afraid!" exclaimed the young American, "Afraid of what? Please tell me."

"Many things. Bandits, holdups, murders and risks I can't name!"

"Why, you would be safer in any part of America than here or elsewhere in the East, or, for that matter, as safe as anywhere in the world."

"Are you sure that in crossing the continent, through the wild regions of your West, we would not be in danger?"

"No more so than on the streets of Paris or London, if even as much so."

"Well, then, your cinema pictures must be all wrong."

Further conversation developed the fact that the foreign lady's entire conception of America and Americans of the present had come from American motion pictures displayed in the theaters of the Far East.

Professor Gilbert Murray, the eminent Oxford scholar and critic, says that people of even up-to-date nations average a generation behind hand in their conception of peoples of other up-to-date nations. This is because what the general public reads about foreign peoples in the main is old. In reading and hearing from travelers about other peoples a public usually gets a fairly accurate view, though it be a generation behind the facts.

The motion picture has introduced a new equation. Where one person used to learn about foreign lands from books or travelers, 10,000 now learn of them from the movies. The spread throughout the world of the American motion picture has given to millions a concept of what they believe our country and our people, our manners and our habits, to be; millions to whom, but for the motion pictures, the United States would not exist, or only as a spot on the world's map.

### Washington Is Interested

**W**HEN educated persons, like the woman in Java, are misled by pictures that are not *per se* objectionable, what must be the effect made on illiterate foreigners by pictures often designed especially for them, or by pictures that have been denied presentation in the United States?

There is considerable evidence that those who have promoted our export trade in motion pictures in the main have acted on the principle that "business is business." Probably there are exceptions, just as there are with regard to the class of pictures produced for domestic display. But with a great number of our motion picture producers the good name of their country, or even the safeguarding of the prestige of the white race in general, has been of no concern; that is, if reports reaching Washington are reliable. If the illiterate Hindus of India will most liberally patronize a film that gives a false view of the morals of Americans, let them have it. If the ignorant Indians of South America want pictures reveling in nastiness, why give it to them. Such pictures when made in the United States portray characters who are or give the impression of being typical Americans. The locale is always domestic. The action, while in truth fanciful, is such as the ignorant and often the intelligent take as being real.

The result is that the masses, and in some degree the classes, in many parts of the world have gained an impression of America and Americans that is not merely a generation behind hand—it is wholly false. The effect may be far-reaching, as the impressions thus gained react on American goods of honest character and have mighty weight in shaping public opinions on international subjects that are of immense importance to us.

Hence authorities in Washington, acting directly and through non-governmental agencies, are giving serious attention to the problem. A high official a few years ago declared one of our popular motion picture stars to be "our best ambassador abroad." That star, however, appears only in clean and healthful pictures. The same is true of some other American stars who have become popular in foreign countries. But it cannot

be said of all. Thus the authorities have come to realize that it is possible for the American motion picture to be "our worst ambassador abroad," as well as our best, depending on whether the picture for export is selected or prepared with scrupulous regard for truth and the mental reactions of the foreigners who will see it.

In many foreign countries there is no censorship, or very lax censorship, and where there is censorship the standards frequently differ from those of Anglo-Saxon countries. Much of Central and South America and a great portion of the Far East, as well as other parts of Asia, afford an immense "dumping ground" for the motion picture producer who thinks of dollars only. The publics often are too poor to patronize costly

**D**O YOU know that the British will not permit the display of many of our "best" motion pictures in some of their colonies populated by colored peoples, because they tend to lower the prestige of the white race? An educated white woman in the Far East actually canceled a trip to the United States because, from what she had seen in our motion pictures shown abroad, she was convinced her life would be in danger! The State Department and other agencies are now making investigations which indicate that unscrupulous motion picture producers, in pandering to depraved tastes of ignorant publics in lands "where there are no Ten Commandments," are shaping public opinions along lines harmful and even dangerous to the United States. Here is the story from original sources.

pictures; they have little artistic sense. They demand sensationalism, the crude and the prurient. Thus old pictures that no longer will "go" in enlightened communities can still be sold in South America and the East. Pictures that go beyond even the tastes of our least critical motion picture fans, and others that are barred by our censorship boards, can by export to certain foreign countries be made profitable.

There is evidence that more and worse than the "leavings" from our domestic supply of pictures are dumped into certain foreign lands.

"Officials have learned that pictures relatively inoffensive from the public standpoint here," says an article in *Variety*, a theatrical publication, "when shown in other countries—in Latin-America, as a particular example—differ so radically as to give the impression that America is manufacturing pretty raw stuff just to get the business."

### "Shooting Double"—and Why

**"C**CHECKING up on this, the government investigators heard in Los Angeles picture circles about a certain super-production that gave them a line they wanted. This production was being 'shot,' as the inside term is, double. That is to say, one set of views was being taken for the American market, another for the foreign. The scenes 'shot' for the foreign market, it was intimated, couldn't be shown here without causing a popular riot.

"The film in mind is being much advertised, or will be, it was declared, as having cost a great deal of money, more than a million. Another point in the advertising would be, it was pointed out, that more than a million feet of film had been taken. Why so much 'footage'? inquirers asked, and, asking this, hit on the point they were looking up."

It is not always necessary to "shoot double" a film to make it satisfactory to American taste and accept-

able to far worse taste in communities "where there are no Ten Commandments." By changing titles and shifting scenes an otherwise acceptable film may be rendered highly objectionable.

An instance of this is believed to be covered in a report reaching Washington recently from Caracas, Venezuela. It was written by an American business man, and describes a film he saw displayed under the imprimatur of one of the most prominent of American producers. He gave English translations of the titles that were shown in Spanish and described in detail several of the scenes which, with all the actors, were American and so realistic that no ignorant observer could believe that they were otherwise than typical of the United States. You can understand the nature of his descriptions when told that the men in the United States Chamber of Commerce headquarters, to whom the report was referred for attention, were themselves impelled to type all correspondence having to do with the matter. It was unfit for the eyes of their girl stenographers. The report was referred to the National Association of the Motion Picture Industry, which said it would be given attention.

Like reports have come from most Central American countries, and an investigation is now being made to fix responsibility. Dr. Francis Holley, of the Bureau of Commercial Economics, which is assisting in the investigation, gives it as his opinion that most of that particular trouble, that is, the manufacture and exporting of outright nauseous films, comes from adventurers who do not belong to the regular motion picture industry. They doctor old films or make new ones of a crude kind, he says, their transactions being of the "fly-by-night" sort.

### No Kissing in Jap Theaters

**T**HE government is under some difficulty in reaching even those whose export productions are of the rawest kind. For the Constitution forbids the placing of embargoes on exports. Of course, the transporting of obscene films within the country—and they have to be transported within the country to get out of it—may be brought within the law. But it is probable that such films can be so divided, or certain features of them, like captions, be left undone until they are out of the country, as to escape laws which now exist.

The problem of dealing with the regular film, that is, of the sort which is acceptable here but is wholly misleading when shown to foreign audiences that cannot differentiate between the fanciful and the actual, is far more difficult.

In his recent book, "Must We Fight Japan," Professor Walter B. Pitkin, of Columbia University, says:

"The motion picture has, from all that I can gather from both natives and Americans who have been studying it in Japan, China and India, done more to blacken the reputation of the white race in general and the United States in particular than all the malice and libel of the most savage anti-American propagandists."

Yet the Japanese sense of decorum is such that all "kissing" scenes have to be deleted from pictures shown there! But, according to the Motion Picture Yearbook for 1920, "some of the very successful pictures" shown in Japan were "Kick In," "Hell's Hinges," "The Slave Market," "The Auction Block," "The Barrier," "Tarzan," and "When a Man Sees Double." Those who have seen the pictures in question may judge of the conception of the American idea they conveyed to the Japanese mind—even with "kissing" scenes omitted.

How a picture that is nothing but passing entertainment when shown in this country may convey ideas wholly false and dangerous when shown to Oriental audiences is explained quite clearly in a pamphlet issued by the British Board of Motion Picture Censors for Bengal, India. It is a very diplomatic pamphlet, being aimed, apparently, at explaining without giving offense the board's action in excluding films that were accepted without criticism by the American movie public. The pamphlet is on file in the Department of Commerce, Washington.

"As is well known," it says in part, "the question of the ruin and degradation caused by drink has loomed largely in America of late. The American producer, in effort to make his point, invariably shows white men and women in exaggerated states of drunk-

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